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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 001492

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [EMIN](#) [PINR](#) [KNNP](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: MONUC FEARS URANIUM SMUGGLING IN CONGO

REF: EMAIL E.BESTIC-J.BERNTSEN 4/9/04

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.5 B and D

11. (C) SUMMARY: A MONUC official based in Katanga province recently visited Shinkolobwe, a local mining area and source of uranium, and expressed concern to Kinshasa-based diplomats about possible illegal uranium-related mining activity. Although Post sees no cause for immediate alarm, Shinkolobwe is definitely a long-term problem, because the Congo's weak state institutions and easily corrupted officials cannot be counted upon to secure the mine site. END SUMMARY.

MONUC Tries to Investigate Shinkolobwe

12. (C) On July 23, MONUC/Lubumbashi chief Magda Gonzales briefed P5 plus South African and Belgian diplomats on her recent visit to the mining center at Shinkolobwe, in Katanga province. (Note: Shinkolobwe is the source of the uranium used by the USG to develop and manufacture the original atomic bombs used during WW2. End Note.) She provided a written report in French, forwarded reftel. Gonzales, a geologist from University of Lubumbashi named Prof. Loris, and a Radio Okapi journalist traveled o/a July 14 to the city of Likasi and the mining site at Shinkolobwe, to investigate a reported cave-in that killed nine and injured possibly a dozen more. Gonzales' group first visited four survivors at Daco Hospital in Likasi. The survivors were "in bad shape," she said, and their skin was green--which the professor told her was a sign of radiation poisoning. She added that the attending physician said the four men would be dead within six months (NFI). Gonzales later said that other artisanal miners in the area reportedly have developed cancerous tumors.

13. (C) The group next proceeded to the reported accident site at Shinkolobwe (NFI). Local authorities at first refused them entry, then relented, but other officials countermanded this closer to the supposed site. To Gonzales' surprise, members of the GDRC national atomic energy commission and officials from the Presidency were already there, with "sophisticated equipment." While Gonzales argued, the latter group left to examine the mine's apparently disused uranium concentrator, but the Radio Okapi journalist secretly followed them. According to Gonzales, the instruments carried by the GDRC group signaled a high level of radioactivity (NFI) at the concentrator. In the end, local authorities escorted the U.N. team to the supposed accident site, but instead led them astray and took them to a different area. When the U.N. team realized this, Gonzales said, she decided to leave Shinkolobwe without having seen the real accident site.

14. (C) After the aborted visit, Gonzales met with the state prosecutor at Kipushi, who reportedly had begun an investigation into the accident. The prosecutor told Gonzales he believed a Congolese army officer had sent a group of young miners to the uranium site at night, but they inadvertently caused the mine to collapse. The same prosecutor also "confirmed" that civil, military and local security authorities were all engaged in exploiting this particular site. Gonzales added that previously, the foreign buyers of illegally-exploited minerals in south Katanga were mostly of Pakistani or Indian origin, but that today, they tend to be from China or Korea.

15. (C) The Belgian poloff attending the MONUC meeting reported that a Lubumbashi-based human rights organization, ASADHO, had drafted a report on the accident but later "withdrew it under pressure." He added that the International Atomic Energy Agency visited Shinkolobwe only a few weeks earlier, and according to the IAEA internal report, said there was nothing to be concerned about at Shinkolobwe.

COMMENT

16. (C) Post has previously reported on Shinkolobwe, and sees no cause for immediate alarm. In our view, MONUC's "findings" in this case are short on detail and therefore far from conclusive. Shinkolobwe is definitely a long-term problem, however, because the Congo's weak state institutions and easily corrupted officials cannot be counted upon to secure the mine site. END COMMENT.

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